

THE GREAT PRAYER.

SHORT CHAPTERS ON JOHN XVII.

BY THE BISHOP OF DURHAM.

III.

THE Theism of the Great Prayer was the matter of our last study. The results were presented in a summary not only brief but slight, as regards any sort of meditative development. We gathered up from a cluster of quotations the primal certainty that, to our Lord Jesus Christ, the ultimate and Sovereign Existence, "the Power that alone is great," is personal and is good; not a transcendental somewhat "higher than deity" but the Intercessor's Father; His Holy Father, His Righteous Father; the Father Who loved the Intercessor before finite being began to be.

Short and meagre as our account of this had to be, it was enough, I venture to think, to help the reverent student, the thinker who has found, or begun to find, rest in the recorded thoughts of Christ. It will remind him that he may look up, *through the eyes of his Lord*, into the Invisible, conscious of immeasurable mysteries around him and above him yet able peacefully to "endure, as seeing HIM that is invisible."³ He may, in Christ, through Christ, discern a living countenance, shining through darkness however vast with the pure regard of right and of love. He may recollect, till he begins in some degree to realize, what lies as an instinctive conviction at the heart of our consciousness, that mind, will, love, are greater than material bulk, necessarily and for ever; above all, that the law of moral right is eternally stable, as the material heavens are not; that their order, their *cosmos*, points upward beyond them, and within them, to mind; and now that the witness of the Seer Who died and rose again tells us that that mind is the mind of His Father, Holy, Righteous, Blessed for ever.

One of Tennyson's latest pieces, short and deep (*God and the Universe*), may be quoted here:

"Will my tiny spark of being wholly vanish in your deeps and heights?
Must my day be dark by reason, O ye Heavens, of your boundless nights,
Rush of suns, and roll of systems, and your fiery clash of meteorites?"

" Spirit, nearing yon dark portal at the limit of thy human state,
 Fear not thou the hidden purpose of that Power which alone is great,
 Nor the myriad world, His shadow, nor the silent Opener of the Gate."

The poet's son tells us that when the old man lay dying, October 5, 1892, he exclaimed, " I have opened it." It seemed possible, to those who knew the motions of his mind, that he had in his thought that last line just quoted; that he felt himself to be pushing apart the folding doors of what is to us the unseen but which the released spirit finds as the wonderfully visible. Let us read into those pregnant verses, as their writer certainly would have us do, not Theism only but Christ, and we shall almost anticipate the moment of our own transition. With our eternal Brother, as if using His eyes, let us " lift up our eyes unto heaven." We shall spiritually see then the profound truth that one " Power alone is great." It is incommensurable in its greatness with the Galaxy, aye, with whatever of stellar vastness lies beyond the Galaxy. And this Power is Abba, Father; the holy Father, the righteous Father, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I said that we should read in those quoted lines not Theism only but Christ. We greatly need to do so if we would rise to a true joy of theistic faith, and to that sort of certainty in it which can only come, as to the greatest things, when reason and the deepest heart converge in sight and witness. I read the other day in a well-known weekly journal a letter, signed " A Theist." The letter set out in noble terms the vital importance, to the development of high character, of " the awakening of the consciousness that there is a Creator, a loving Creator, with Whom man must co-operate; the constant recognition that there is an all-powerful and loving Creator, Who sees all things and knows all things:—this is the surest basis of goodness." Then further, after a few lines: " Never yet has any substitute been found for the love of God, although *God may be spelt Christ, or Mohammed, or the rest.*" I hope it was not bigotry that gave me a shudder as I read those last words. Partly, I think, it was the startling mistake of thought which suggested that Mohammed, even by the most ardent Moslem, was ever taken as a " spelling " for God. Confusion of facts could hardly go further than in that collocation of his name with Christ's, as one of varied " spellings of God," and that God a God of love. But the chief sadness was due to the implied failure to see the glory of Him Who could say,

with all His character, all His life, all His death and resurrection in the words, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; I and the Father are one."

Let me, in a spirit the very opposite to the controversial, take up this "Theist's" words about Him, and appropriate them to our holy and happy creed. Yes, let us "spell God, *Christ*." Let us recite again to our souls the mighty Creed of the Communion, and confess out of the depth of those souls Him Who is very God of very God, and think with joy that in Him we have the supreme Idea made invisible, tangible, lovable; robbed of not one bright iota of its eternal glory, while incarnated into our Saviour, our Friend, our Brother. Let us "spell God, *Christ*," and then look up into the heavens. As is the Son, so is the Father; as is the Father, so is the Son. "Jesus is the visible God; God is the invisible Jesus"; so said, not long ago, a new convert to the faith, a cultured Indian. Knowing God in Christ Jesus we need not, and we will not, "fear the hidden purpose of the Power that alone is great."

Almost in despite of the aim with which this chapter was begun I have thus detained our thoughts upon the Theism of the Lord Jesus Christ. The reflections have glided, insensibly but not carelessly, from His Theism, in its sight of the glory of the Father, to our Theism, as it shapes itself by a true confession of the glory of the Son. In a subsequent study I hope to take up more directly and distinctly that latter theme, and to gather up what the Great Prayer reveals to us, in manifold assertion or suggestion, of the holy Intercessor's being and dignity. The little said here already will leave ample room for that more explicit study.

For the present, let us come back to where, in the last chapter, we placed ourselves as searchers after God; at the side of the Lord Jesus Christ as He, looking up into heaven, utters the Great Prayer. Let us humbly move up to His side, and stand there amidst His apostles, who will surely welcome us, with a love learnt from Him, into "fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ." We have just come in from the night and its shadows. We have been gazing up to the burning constellations of the Syrian sky. For the time they have spoken to our "modern" thoughts not of the glory of the creating Mind, but of the overwhelming, dismaying, soul-oppressing vastness of the universe of matter. We have been pierced and shaken by the question, what are we in the midst

of it but grains of sand on the shore, flecks of foam on the water? Aye, and we have come in also from the city and the night, with eyes and ears that have felt the moral miseries of human life. The streets have shown us the mysteries of vice and violence. We have heard hopeless cries and yet more hopeless laughter in the gloom. Our own hearts have felt all too often the deadly stress of temptation, not without failure. And they have known losses and sorrows which have chilled and shadowed earth and sky for us, withering the bloom of yesterday and of to-day. So we enter the sanctuary of the Great Prayer, so we approach the Intercessor, and overhear His utterance as He looks up to the invisible. What comes to us as we listen? No reasoned solution of one single problem either of intellect or heart. No, but the power of a Personality which asserts itself as wholly good, wholly wise, and which invites the whole weight of us men's absolute reliance; on the eve, as we know now so well, of a suffering and a victory which bespeak Him Redeemer and Lord of the dead and living. He knows all that we know, and immensely more, of both material and moral mystery. He knows it immeasurably better than we. And through it all He says, looking up to heaven, with a certainty immediate and absolute, "Father, Holy Father, Righteous Father." In Him, and in His vision, we rest, we live, we overcome.

HANDLEY DUNELM.

STUDIES IN TEXTS.

Suggestions for Sermons from Current Literature.

BY THE REV. HARRINGTON C. LEES, M.A.

VIII. FOUR PASTORAL RELATIONSHIPS.

Texts.—"I was like the mother that lovingly nurses her own children."—I Thess. ii. 7 (A.S. Way).

"As a father with his own children."—ii. 11. R.V.

"We were babes in the midst of you."—ii. 7. R.V.M.

"Ye remember, brothers, our labour."—ii. 9.

[Book of the Month: Plummer's "First Thessalonians"¹ = P.

¹ Published by Robert Scott, 6s. Clear, illuminating, spiritual, like all Dr. Plummer's Commentaries. These notes, too full for a sermon, might well form basis for clerical Quiet Day, or Ruridecanal Chapter devotional study.